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Unspooked

CIA representatives make pitch at Tech despite some heckling

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BLACKSBURG — A pair of Central Intelligence Agency representatives dodged heckles at Virginia Tech Tuesday as they made a low-key recruiting pitch to students.

At least 100 of 300 listeners in Whittimore Hall wore anti-CIA stickers during an hour-long presentation. A few people interrupted the speakers with angry questions, oral challenges or honks of horns.

The Student Engineers Council sponsored the talk. Students interested in hearing the speeches successfully told some hecklers to shut up.

John Chomeau, coordinator for academic affairs for the CIA, described the agency's activities:

- "Analysts" study information written or broadcast throughout the world and try to make policy recommendations based on information that is often scanty, he said.

- "Clandestine affairs" involves recruiting foreign nationals to supply the United States with information.

- "Counterintelligence" involves "catching spies" in America.

- "Covert action" involves secretly aiding foreign powers or organizations.

Chomeau declared his remarks "off the record," even though he was speaking at a public gathering. Television cameramen continued filming and at least one newspaper reporter recorded Chomeau's remarks to the audience.

Mike Levitt, an administrator in research and development for the agency, described technical careers in the CIA.

Experts in every scientific field are hired to survey world scientific literature and write reports on areas that may have a bearing on national security. Others study ways to electronically sift and analyze information, and some build James Bond gadgets, Levitt said.

A half-hour was allowed for questions, which listeners scribbled on index cards.

Chomeau promised to answer every written question but did not do so. He announced at the end of the hour that he had been called away.

"I thought you were going to read them all," someone called.

"I gotta leave," Chomeau said.

"So you lied," someone else shouted.

"This is beyond my control," Chomeau said.

"That's always your story," a heckler said.